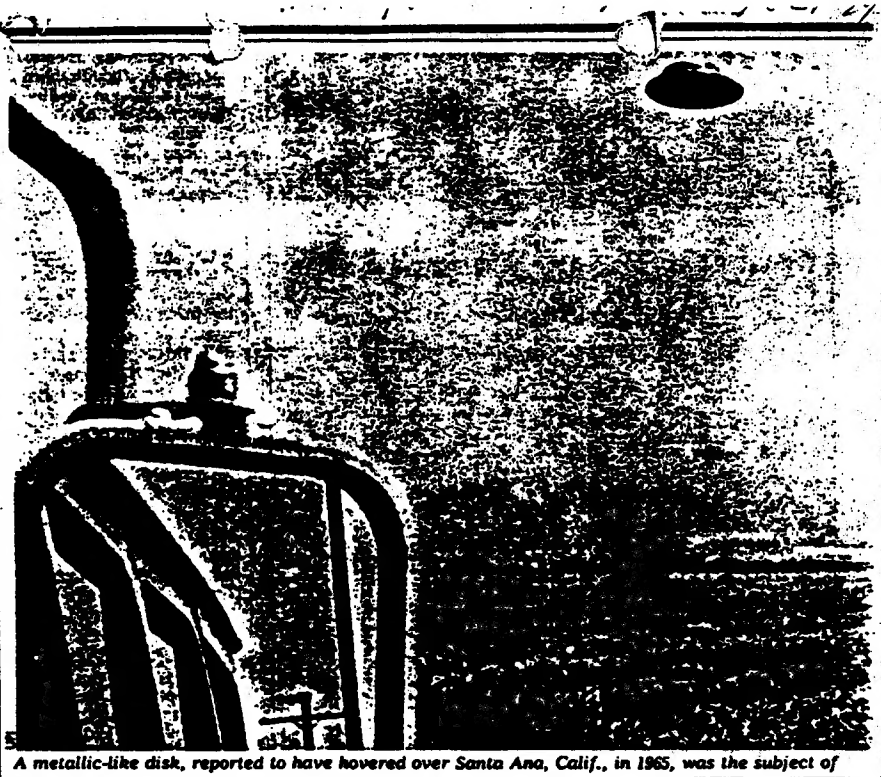


A metallic-like disk, reported to have hovered over Santa Ana, Calif., in 1965, was the subject of

U.F.O. FILES: THE UNTOLD STORY

Though officials have long denied that they take 'flying saucers' seriously, declassified documents now reveal extensive Government concern over the phenomenon.

By Patrick Huyghe

Sighting over Oregon: One of the best photographic records.

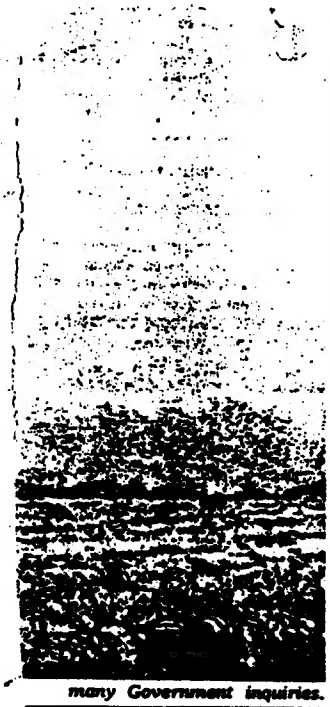
The Defense Department message bears the classification CONFIDENTIAL. "Subject: Suspicious Unknown Air Activity." Dated Nov. 11, 1975, it reads:

"Since 28 Oct 75 numerous reports of suspicious objects have been received at the NORAD COC [North American Air Defense Combat Operations Center]. Reliable military personnel at Loring AFB [Air Force Base], Maine, Wurtsmith AFB, Michigan, Malmstrom AFB, [Montana], Minot AFB, [North Dakota], and Canadian Forces Station, Falconbridge, Ontario, Canada, have visually sighted suspicious objects.

"Objects at Loring and Wurtsmith were characterized to be helicopters. Missile site personnel, security alert teams and Air Defense personnel at Malmstrom Montana reported object which sounded like a jet aircraft. FAA advised 'There were no jet aircraft in the vicinity.' Malmstrom search and height finder radars carried the object between 9,000 ft and 15,600 ft at a speed of seven knots. ... F-106s scrambled from Malmstrom could not make contact due to darkness and low altitude. Site personnel reported the objects as low as 200 ft and said that as the interceptors approached the lights went out. After the interceptors had passed the lights came on again. One hour after the F-106s returned to base, missile site personnel reported the object increased to a high speed, raised in altitude and could not be discerned from the stars. ...

"I have expressed my concern to SAFOI [Air Force Information Office] that we come up soonest with a proposed answer to queries from the press to prevent overreaction by the public to reports by the media that may be blown out of proportion. To date efforts by Air Guard helicopters, SAC [Strategic Air Command] helicopters and NORAD F-106s have failed to produce positive ID."

Patrick Huyghe is a freelance writer in New York.



many Government inquiries.

Numerous daily updates ept the Joint Chiefs of Staff nformed of these incursions y U.F.O.'s in the fall of 1975. epresentatives of the De- ense Intelligence Agency and he National Security Agency well as a handful of other overnment desks received opies of the National Military ommand Center's reports on ie incidents. One report said iat an unidentified object demonstrated a clear intent the weapons storage area." hough Air Force records ow that the C.I.A. was noti- ed several times of these netrations over nuclear mis- le and bomber bases, the ency has acknowledged only o ie such notification. Subse- ient investigations by the Air ce into the sightings at Lor- g Air Force Base, Maine, here the remarkable series events began, did not reveal cause for the sightings.

Despite official pronounce- ents for decades that F.O.'s were nothing more an misidentified aerial ob- ts and as such were no use for alarm, recently de- assified U.F.O. records from C.I.A., the F.B.I. and other deral agencies indicate at, ever since U.F.O.'s made eir appearance in our skies the 1940's, the phenomenon s aroused much serious be- nd-the-scenes concern in of- ial circles. Details of the in- lligence community's pro- ject of U.F.O.'s have emerged over the past few years with the release of long-withheld Government records obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Though these papers fail to resolve the U.F.O. enigma, they do manage to dispel many popular notions about the U.F.O. controversy, as well as give substance to a number of others.

Official records now available appear to put to rest doubts that the Government knew more about U.F.O.'s than it has claimed over the past 32 years. From the start, it has been convinced that most U.F.O. sightings could be explained in terms of misidentified balloons, cloud formations, airplanes, ball lightning, meteors and other natural phenomena.

But the papers also show that the Government remains perplexed about the nagging residue of unexplained U.F.O. sightings, which amount to approximately 10 percent of all U.F.O. sightings reported. Do they pose a threat to national security? Are they just a funny-looking cover for an airborne Soviet presence? Even the possibility that these *unknowns could* be evidence of extraterrestrial visitations has been given serious attention in Government circles.

While official interest in U.F.O.'s has long been thought to be strictly the concern of the Air Force, the bulk of whose records has been open to public view for nearly a decade, the recently released papers on U.F.O.'s indicate otherwise. The Departments of the Army, Navy, State and Defense, and the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the F.B.I., the C.I.A. and even the Atomic Energy Commission produced U.F.O. records over the years. Many of these agencies still do, and many of their documents remain classified. But it is the C.I.A. that appears to have played the key role in the controversy, and may even be responsible for the Government's conduct in U.F.O. investigations throughout the years.

U.F.O.'s have been the province of the nation's intelligence community ever since the beginning of the cold war, when the notion took hold that some flying saucers might actually represent a secret, technologically advanced, foreign weapons system. "Every time we were concerned," recalls Herbert Scoville Jr., a former chief of the C.I.A.'s Office of Scientific Intelligence, "it was because we wanted to know: Did the Russians do it?"

As the cold war gave rise to the fears of the McCarthy era, even [illegible] to the surveillance of sever[illegible]rivate U.F.O. organizations (as many of their members have long insisted) and to the scrutiny of dozens of individuals suspected of subversive U.F.O. activities.

Perhaps most telling of all, the Government documents on U.F.O.'s reveal that despite official denials to the contrary, Federal agencies continue to monitor the phenomenon to this day.

The monumental task of unearthing the newest batch of records on U.F.O.'s from a bureaucracy that has for years denied their existence can be traced to the efforts of a handful of inquisitive individuals who, armed with the Freedom of Information Act, set off in the mid-70's on a paper chase of U.S. Government documents on U.F.O.'s. They include Bruce S. Maccabee, a Silver Spring, Md., physicist working for the Navy, who has managed to obtain the release of more than 1,200 pages of documents on U.F.O.'s from the F.B.I.; W. Todd Zechel of Prairie du Sac, Wis.; Robert Todd of Ardmore, Pa.; Larry W. Bryant of Arlington, Va.; and Brad C. Sparks, a student in astrophysics at Berkeley whose five-year pursuit of the C.I.A.'s U.F.O. file eventually provided the foundation for a ground-breaking Freedom of Information lawsuit filed by Ground Saucer Watch (G.S.W.), an Arizona-based U.F.O. organization.

At the request of G.S.W. director William H. Spaulding, Peter Gersten, an attorney in the New York firm of Rothblatt, Rothblatt & Seijas, filed a civil action against the C.I.A. in December 1977 demanding all U.F.O. records in the agency's possession. The suit seemed to have achieved its goal when late last year the agency released about 400 documents — nearly 900 pages of memos, reports and correspondence that attest to the agency's long involvement in U.F.O. matters. But the civil action has not seen its final day in court.

By Gersten's account, the agency has arbitrarily withheld documents, made deletions without merit, and failed to conduct a proper search for U.F.O. materials. The agency's current actions, he says, perpetuate its 30-year policy of deliberate deception and dishonesty about U.F.O.'s. "What has been released to us seems to have been rather carefully selected," says Gersten. "We suspect that the agency is withholding at least 200 more documents than the 57 they have admitted they are keeping from us to protect intelligence sources." Victor Marchetti, a former executive

deputy director, agrees with Gersten. "The entire exercise, Marchetti wrote recently in a magazine article, "has the same aroma of the agency's previous messy efforts to hide its involvement in drugs and mind-control operations, both prime examples of a successful intelligence cover-up."

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The first sighting to be labeled a "flying saucer" by the press occurred on June 24, 1947, when an Idaho businessman flying his plane near Mount Rainier observed nine disc-shaped objects making undulating motions "like a saucer skipping over water." As early as World War II, Allied bomber pilots had told of "balls of light" that followed their flights over Japan and Germany. A U.S. Eighth Army investigation concluded that they were the product of "mass hallucination."

These and other incidents were reported in a 1973 book by David Michael Jacobs, "The UFO Controversy in America," which until the recent release of Government documents was the most comprehensive reconstruction of the Government's U.F.O. involvement.

When Scandinavians reported cigar-shaped objects in 1946, U.S. Army intelligence suspected that the Russians had developed a secret weapon with the help of German scientists from Peenemünde. The C.I.A., then known as the Central Intelligence Group, secretly began keeping tabs on the subject.

When the unknown objects returned to the skies, this time over the United States in the summer of 1947, the Army Air Force set out to determine what the objects were. Within weeks, Brig. Gen. George F. Schulgen of Army Air Corps Intelligence requested the F.B.I.'s assistance "in locating and questioning the individuals who first sighted the so-called flying discs. . . ." Undoubtedly swayed by flaring cold-war tensions, Schulgen feared that "the first reported sightings might have been by individuals of Communist sympathies with the view to causing hysteria and fear of a secret Russian weapon." J. Edgar Hoover agreed to cooperate but insisted that the bureau have "full access to discs recovered."

The Air Force's behind-the-scenes interest contrasted sharply with its public stance that the objects were products of misidentifications and an imaginative populace. A security lid was imposed on the subject in July 1947, hiding a potentially "embarrassing situation" the following month, when both the Air Force and the F.B.I. began suspecting they might actu-

secret weapons. High-level reassurances were obtained that this was not so.

By the end of the summer, the F.B.I. had "failed to reveal any indication of subversive individuals being involved in any of the reported sightings." A RESTRICTED Army letter that found its way to Hoover's desk said that the bureau's services actually had been enlisted to relieve the Air Forces "of the task of tracking down all the many instances which turned out to be ashcan covers, toilet seats and whatnot." Incensed, Hoover moved quickly to discontinue the bureau's U.F.O. investigations.

In September of that year, the Commanding General of the Army Air Force received a letter from the Army Chief of Staff Lieut. Gen. Nathan F. Twining, saying that "the phenomenon reported is of something real and not visionary or fictitious," that the objects appeared to be disc-shaped, "as large as man-made aircraft," and "controlled either manually, automatically or remotely." At Twining's request, project "Sign" was established.

"Sign" failed to find any evidence that the objects were Soviet secret weapons and before long submitted an unofficial "Estimate of the Situation," classified TOP SECRET, which indicated that U.F.O.'s were of interplanetary origin. The estimate eventually reached Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, who rejected it for lack of proof. "Sign's" inconclusive final report remained classified for the next 12 years.

After "Sign," the Air Force continued to collect U.F.O. data under the code name "Grudge." This six-month project found no evidence of foreign scientific development and therefore no direct threat to national security. It did, however, stress that the reported sightings could be dangerous. "There are indications that the planned release of related psychological propaganda would cause a form of mass hysteria," the report stated. "Employment of these methods by or against an enemy would yield similar results . . . governmental agencies interested in psychological warfare should be informed of the results of this study."

A press release following the termination of "Grudge" allowed the public to believe that the Air Force was no longer interested in U.F.O.'s. But the Air Force continued to collect reports through normal intelligence channels until a dramatic sighting of a U.F.O. at the Army Signal Corps radar center in Fort Monmouth, N.J., in 1951 led to the reacti-

vation of "Grudge." The Air Force project was renamed "Blue Book" in 1952, a year that saw a record number of U.F.O. reports.

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The situation got out of hand during the summer of 1952. On the morning of July 28, the Washington Post revealed that U.F.O.'s had been tracked on radar at Washington National Airport, the second such incident in a week. Reporters stormed Air Force headquarters in the Pentagon, where switchboards were jammed for days with U.F.O. inquiries. Military installations across the country handled such a volume of reports that "regular intelligence work had been affected," reported The New York Times.

These events prompted action at C.I.A. headquarters, apparently at a request "from the Hill." From the start, the agency's involvement was to be kept secret. An August 1 C.I.A. memo recommended that "no indication of C.I.A. interest or concern reach the press or public, in view of their probable alarmist tendencies to accept such interest as 'confirmatory' of the soundness of 'unpublished facts' in the hands of the U.S. Government."

The C.I.A.'s Office of Scientific Intelligence (O.S.I.) found that the Air Force's investigation of the U.F.O. phenomenon was not sufficiently rigorous to determine the exact nature of the objects in the sky. Neither did the Air Force deal adequately with the potential danger of U.F.O.-induced mass hysteria, or the fact that our air vulnerability was being seriously affected by the U.F.O. problem. O.S.I. chief H. Marshall Chadwell thought that our nation's defenses were running the increasing risk of false alert and, worse yet, "of falsely identifying the real as phantom." He suggested that a national policy be established "as to what should be told the public" and, furthermore, that immediate steps be taken to improve our current visual and electronic identification techniques so that "instant positive identification of enemy planes or missiles can be made." Ever vigilant, the C.I.A. was keeping an eye on the possibility that U.F.O.'s could be of Soviet origin.

By the winter of 1952, Chadwell had drafted a National Security Council proposal calling on a program to solve the problem of instant positive identification of U.F.O.'s. In a memo that accompanied the proposal, Chadwell urged that the reports be given "immediate attention." He thought that "sightings of unexplained objects at great altitudes and traveling at high speeds in the vicinity of major U.S. defense installations are of such nature that they are not attributable to natural phenomena or known types of aerial vehicles." He said that O.S.I. was proceeding with the establishment of a consulting group "of sufficient competence and stature to . . . convince the responsible authorities in the community that immediate research and development on this subject must be undertaken."

But C.I.A. Director Gen. Walter B. Smith's interest apparently lay elsewhere. In a letter to the Director of the Psychological Strategy Board, he expressed a desire to discuss "the possible offensive and defensive utilization of these phenomena for psychological warfare purposes." Only later did Director Smith authorize recruiting an advisory committee of outside consultants.

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The scientific panel met for four days beginning Jan. 14, 1953. Chaired by Dr. H.P. Robertson, an expert in physics and weapons systems, the panel essentially bestowed the scientific seal of approval on previously established official policy regarding U.F.O.'s. The distinguished panelists felt that all the sightings could be identified once all the data were available for a proper evaluation — in other words, the phenomena, according to the panel's report, were not "beyond the domain of present knowledge of physical sciences." Neither did the panelists find U.F.O.'s to be a direct threat to national security, though they believed that the volume of U.F.O. reports could clog military intelligence channels, precipitate panic, and lead defense personnel to ignore real indications of hostile action. The panel worried about Soviet manipulation of the phenomenon; that the reports could make the public vulnerable to "possible enemy psychological warfare." The real danger, they concluded, was the reports themselves.

Fearing that the myth of U.F.O.'s might lead to inappropriate actions by the American public, the panelists decided that a "broad educational program integrating efforts of all concerned agencies" must be undertaken. They sought to strip U.F.O.'s of their "aura of mystery" through this program of "training and 'debunking.'" The program would result in the "proper recognition of unusually illuminated objects" and in a "reduction in public interest in 'flying saucers.'" The panelists recommended that their mass-media program have as its advisers psychologists familiar with mass psychology and advertising experts, while Walt Disney Inc. animated cartoons and such personalities as Arthur Godfrey would help in the educational drive. To insure complete control over the situation, the panel members suggested that flying-saucer groups be "watched because of their potentially great influence on mass thinking if widespread sightings should occur. The apparent irresponsibility and the possible use of such groups for subversive purposes should be kept in mind."

The panel's recommendations called for nothing less than the domestic manipulation of public attitudes. Whether these proposals were acted upon, the C.I.A. will not say. But the report was circulated among the top brass at the Air Technical Intelligence Center, the C.I.A.'s Board of National Estimates (of which Hoover was a member), the C.I.A.'s bureau chiefs, the Secretary of Defense, the chairman of the National Security Resources Board, and the director of the Federal Civil Defense Administration, who eventually sent a representative to meet with C.I.A. officials in order to "implement the appropriate aspects of the Panel's Report as applicable to Civil Defense."

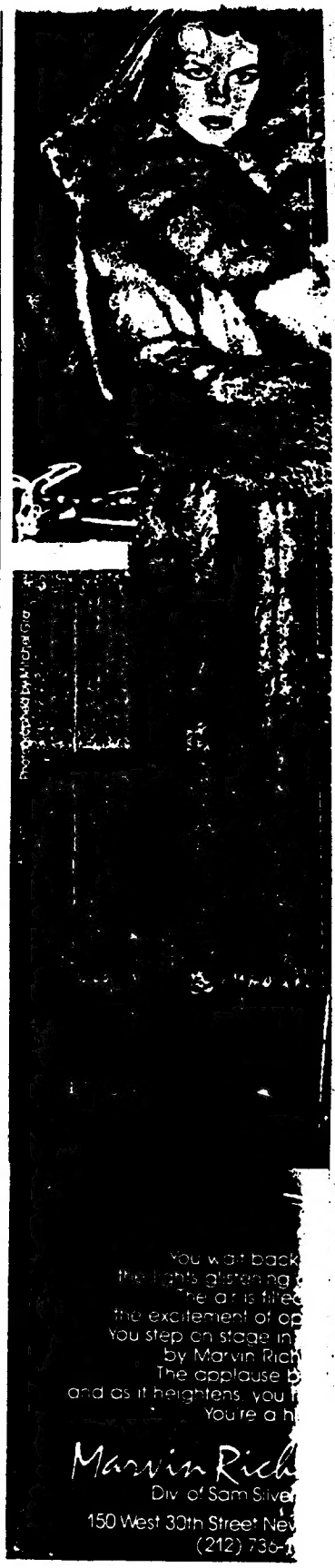
The Government's efforts in the 50's and 60's to squelch

U.F.O.'s went beyond debunking and [illegible] touched the fiber of constitutionally protected free speech. According to author David Michael Jacobs, in 1953 the Air Force pressured Look magazine into publishing disclaimers throughout an article by retired Maj. Donald E. Keyhoe entitled "Flying Saucers From Outer Space." Then again, in 1965, the Army — in a prepublication review — denied clearance for a U.F.O.-related article by one of its employees, Larry W. Bryant, a technical editor, until he took the issue to court.

Meanwhile, the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. proceeded routinely in the surveillance of U.F.O. organizations and U.F.O. enthusiasts. People with U.F.O. interests were checked out by the F.B.I. at the request of the C.I.A., the Air Force, or private citizens inquiring about possible subversive activities. None caused as much consternation as the case of Major Keyhoe and the organization he directed, the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP).

The C.I.A. appears to have had a protracted interest in NICAP, which was founded in 1956 and utilized by Keyhoe as an organizational tool for challenging the alleged Air Force cover-up on U.F.O.'s. Both the C.I.A. and the Air Force were upset by NICAP's wide-ranging influence. Its prestigious board of directors included, among others, Vice Adm. Roscoe Hillenkoetter, the first C.I.A. Director (1947-1950). "The Air Force representatives believe that much of the trouble . . . with Major Keyhoe . . . could be alleviated," states a C.I.A. memo dated May 16, 1958, "if the Major did not have such important personages as Vice Admiral R. H. Hillenkoetter, U.S.N. (Ret.) . . . on the board. . . ." The Air Force suggested that if the Admiral were shown the SECRET panel report he might understand and take "appropriate actions." Whether or not the Air Force got through to the admiral, Hillenkoetter resigned from NICAP in 1961.

The 60's saw further C.I.A. interest in NICAP. After a flurry of Washington-area sightings in 1965, the agency contacted NICAP about seeing some of its case files on the matter. Richard H. Hall, then NICAP assistant director, chatted with a C.I.A. agent in the NICAP office about the sightings, NICAP's methodology, and Hall's background. The agent's memo on the visit suggests that the C.I.A. had some role in mind for Hall, predicated upon his being granted a security clearance. Nothing apparently came of the suggestion. A later set of



C.I.A. paper reveals an interest in NICAP organizational structure and notes that "this group included some ex-C.I.A. and Defense Intelligence types who advise on investigative techniques and NICAP-Government relations." There are presently three former C.I.A. employees on the NICAP board of directors, including Charles Lombard, a congressional aide to Senator Barry Goldwater, who is himself a NICAP board member; and retired U.S. Air Force Col. Joseph Bryan III. Bryan feels, as he did back in 1959 when he joined the board, that U.F.O.'s are interplanetary. NICAP's current president is Alan Hall, a former C.I.A. covert employee for 30 years.

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In 1966, mounting discontent from members of the press, Congress and the scientific community compelled the Air Force to commission an 18-month scientific study of U.F.O.'s under the direction of Edward U. Condon, professor of physics at the University of Colorado. The politically expedient study, in which one-third of the 91 cases examined remained unidentified, reiterated official policy with one novel twist: U.F.O.'s "educationally harmed" schoolchildren who were allowed to use science study time to read books and magazine articles about U.F.O.'s. Condon wanted teachers to withhold credit from any student U.F.O. project. The Air Force took the cue and disbanded project "Blue Book" in 1969.

Less than a decade later, the White House, perhaps in an attempt to make good Jimmy Carter's campaign promise to tell all about U.F.O.'s, suggested via science advisor Frank Press that possibly NASA could undertake a review of any significant new findings since Condon's study. NASA examined the offer, but saw no way to attack the problem on a scientific basis without physical evidence. They envisioned a public-relations nightmare if they were to accept such a project, and so rejected it. A frank, in-house evaluation of NASA's options, however, noted that a hands-off attitude only begged the question. So in good spirit, the space agency offered to examine any piece of physical evidence brought to its attention. That position led one Federal aviation official to comment: "If you get a piece of the thing, fine. But don't bother me with anything else."

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These days, the Air Force admits to nothing more than a "transitory interest" in the phenomenon, although military directives still exist for reporting U.F.O.'s.

The C.I.A. is still wary of the possibility that U.F.O.'s may be of Soviet origin. "The agency's interest," says Katherine Pherson, a public-affairs officer for the C.I.A., "lies in its responsibility to forewarn principally of the possibility that a foreign power might develop a new weapons system that might exhibit phenomena that some might categorize as a U.F.O. But there is no program to actively collect information on U.F.O.'s." The agency's interest cannot be denied, however, as two 1976 memos reveal.

The first, dated April 26, states: "It does not seem that the Government has any formal program in progress for the identification/solution of the U.F.O. phenomena. Dr. [name deleted] feels that the efforts of independent researchers, [phrase deleted], are vital for further progress in this area. At the present time, there are offices and personnel within the agency who are monitoring the U.F.O. phenomena, but again, this is not currently on an official basis."

Another memo, dated July 14, and routed to the deputy chief in the Office of Development and Engineering, reads: "As you may recall, I mentioned my own interest in the subject as well as the fact that DCD [Domestic Collection Division] has been receiving U.F.O. related material from many of our S & T [Science and Technology] sources who are presently conducting related research. These scientists include some who have been associated with the Agency for years and whose credentials remove them from the 'nut' variety."

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If nothing else, the success of the U.F.O. paper chase may have lent U.F.O.'s a measure of respectability that has eluded the subject for the past third of a century. Though it appears that no U.F.O. sighting has ever represented an airborne Soviet or foreign threat, the possibility that such an event could occur remains foremost in the cold-war-conscious Government mind. Should that threat come to pass, military officials believe, our nation's sophisticated defense system would know about it before someone getting a glass of milk in the middle of the night sees the threat hovering outside the kitchen window. Or so we are made to understand the Air Force's seemingly nonchalant advice to the public: "If you see a U.F.O. and you feel the situation warrants it, call your local police." ■